

The Impact of Culture on the American Wedding Dress

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Ball State University
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May 2016

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2016

Abstract: The Impact of Culture on the American Wedding Dress

The purpose of this paper is ultimately to predict the predominant style of wedding dresses which will be worn in the decade of 2020. In order to make connections throughout the piece, the evolution of marriage culture and the wedding dress in America must first be understood. Next, to make an informed prediction, one must determine what factors have an effect on the dress and how they ultimately translate into stylistic features. American current events, culture, and fashion (as they pertain to women) come together with American wedding culture in any given decade to shape the model of the ideal wedding gown.

Upon analyzing the different culture, fashion, and views of marriage across the span of 50 years, from the 1920s and again from the 1970s, it becomes clear how they are translated into the style of the respective decade's wedding dress. The connections are further verified by analyzing Ball State University's Beeman Collection's authentic, locally-donated wedding gowns from each period. Based on the understanding of these connections between culture and dress, the predicted culture of 2020 can be used to anticipate a prominent style of dress for the American weddings of that decade. The paper will finally anticipate that cultural atmosphere, draw the connections, and forecast the gown.

In brief summary, the 1920s wedding dresses were heavily influenced by such cultural factors as feminism and technological advancements, as well as consumerism, all due in part to the state of change in post-war America. The dresses of the 1970s were mainly influenced by nostalgia and feminism as a result of an economic downturn during the period. With a forecasted future of advanced technology, social responsibility, and social acceptance, the gowns of the 2020s will appear less traditional (long, white, conservative, etc.) and more reflective of individual's personalities (colorful, sexually appealing, etc.).

The Impact of Culture on the American Wedding Dress

Marriage is generally understood around the world to be a legal bond between people who wish to love and support each other indefinitely. While this is a universal concept, there are many variations of wedding ceremonies and post-marriage expectations among different cultures. The United States is recognized as a country with uniquely contrasting collective views on marriage. Though it is common for people to have a unified view of marriage within a country, Americans tend to simultaneously support conflicting marriage ideals. While the U.S. government uses funds to promote marriage and nearly every citizen has an opinion on the legalization of same-sex marriage, the country also has one of the shortest “no-fault divorce” wait times and said divorces are common, often taken lightly. The combination of the traditional value placed on the marriage and the new-age desire for individualism/self-expression has caused both American marriage rates and American divorce rates to be higher than those of comparable countries, demonstrating the distinctively differing values within the nation which can affect the wedding and the style of the garments used in the ceremony (Cherlin, 2009).

While the general popularity of marriage has not waned, the cultural ideals and expectations have shifted. Marriage was previously considered a necessary and definitively irreversible step in one’s life. It appears as though Americans now see marriage as the best option for a family lifestyle, feel it should remain exclusive and permanent, and believe that divorce is a viable option that should remain a “last resort” (Cherlin, 2009).

It is not surprising that, given these strong values regarding the marriage itself, Americans throughout history have taken part in distinct wedding ceremonies. Wearing a popular style of wedding gown became a crucial part of the ceremony in the United States following the popularization of the white dress by Queen Victoria in 1840. For more than 100 years, the dress

has sat atop the American bride's priority list. Its importance doesn't seem to be dwindling in popular culture either, though the most widely accepted styles continue to change. There are currently several television shows such as TLC's *Say Yes to the Dress* and *I found the Gown* which are dedicated to helping brides choose the perfect garment their special day.

The dresses currently seen on TV today are different from the one that Queen Victoria wore to shape the "white wedding", a phrase which describes the many wedding ceremonies throughout history featuring a white gown. The wedding dresses, as seen in any given country prior to 1800, were even more different from that first popular white gown than the gowns of today. For a woman's big day, she simply wore her finest garment. The gown with the highest quality fabric and most current style would be worn for the ceremony and again when another special occasion arose. Because of its intended versatility and lack of social norms regarding the color of a wedding dress, the gowns could be seen in various colors commonly including blue, brown, grey, and occasionally white. This changed after Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom was wed to Prince Albert in 1840, pioneering the white gown which would become the inspiration for the single most important garment in many women's lives (see Figure 1). She wore a white gown made of silk and trimmed with orange blossoms (Howard, 2006). The garment did not spark much immediate popularity but by the end of the century it became the go-to style and was mimicked by brides around the world (Jellison, 2008). Because the United



2012 display of Queen Victoria's
1840 gown
Photo: Getty Images
Figure 1

States was more heavily influenced by Western European culture than other Eastern or Asian cultures, American brides were quick to adopt the style as opposed to something more oriental.

Because of the emphasis of value placed by Americans on marriage, and therefore the wedding, the wedding dress as made popular by Queen Victoria has become an iconic, integral, and ever changing piece of fashion. To highlight the impact of culture on the American wedding dress, two decades will be analyzed, the 1920s and 1970s. As previously mentioned, it wasn't until the end of the century that the white wedding gown gained its world-wide popularity. The 1920s marked the beginning of the United States' adoption of the tradition so it is crucial to consider this decade. By evaluating decades in fifty year intervals (1970s and 2020s), not only can accurate forecast be made due to the nearness of the 2020s but an entire century's worth of change can truly show the continuously evolving nature of the gown. Important aspects of American culture, especially as they relate to the women of the time, will be examined. Key fashion trends for women will be discussed and popular cultural views will be dissected on the wedding ceremony and marriage in order to understand how cultural factors influenced the most popular style of wedding gown from each decade. In addition, popular styles of each decade (1920s and 1970s) will be compared to those of the locally donated gowns kept in Ball State University's Beeman Collection of historic dress to ensure the connections between the cultural factors and prominent styles of wedding dress hold true. After gaining a thorough understanding of the ways in which the culture of the times affected the dresses of the past, I will provide a prediction of the cultural environment of the United States for the decade of 2020 and forecast the dominant style of wedding gown in that environment.

1920s

Entering the 1920s, America was a newly industrialized country with mass production capabilities which would lead to the popularization of many life altering products. Thanks to new technologies, the American people could use cars and telephones to not only connect with those immediately around them, but gain easy access to people and parts of the country which were previously inaccessible (Seid, 1989). In addition, the consumer culture of the country was changing. Advertising became a popular concept during WWI due to military recruitment, Liberty Bond promotions, and food conservation efforts. Because of the importance of these messages during the war, an excess profits tax was passed in 1917 which also helped change the reputation of advertising (Howard, 2006). The technological advancements made during industrialization, the increasing use of advertising following the wartime efforts, and the new popularity of brands and personal image changed the way goods were made and sold, sparking the transformation of the traditional American customer into an avid consumer (Howard, 2006). Personal consumption tripled during this period with the new way of thinking about products (Howard, 2006).

Social changes were on the rise as well after the war forced women to enter to the workforce. Many previously male-dominated industries such as agriculture, health, and auxiliary services were taken over by aptly qualified female counterpart. This led women to push a feminist agenda which greatly affected the culture of the time (Kybalová, 1968). It was during this decade that a huge leap in equality was made; the efforts of these Americans feminists secured the right for women to vote. This "New Woman" became committed to fighting for social causes, developing a professional career, and receiving a higher education in addition to seeking gender equality in general (Howard, 2006).

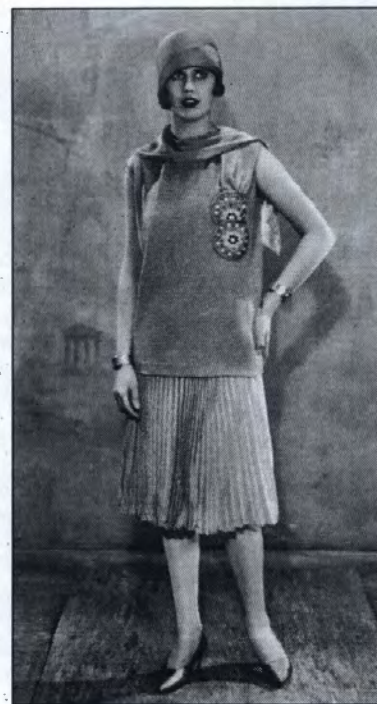
Pop culture and the arts were affected drastically during this time, mostly as a result of technological advancements. Phonograph production reached 5 million by 1929 leaving the 1920's filled with exciting music and dancing, and often considered the "Jazz Age". In addition to new music, the mass entertainment industry fostered the popularity of movies. Hollywood began booming during this time and it was estimated that nearly 75% of the American people went to the movie theatre each week. It was the movies especially which influenced the pop culture definition of gender by often featuring females as either symbols of sex or flapper girls. This was not only an important factor in the developing culture of the time but in the fashion as well ("The formation of modern," 2016).

Understanding the women's fashion trends of the decade is critical because not only will there be a clear connection between the styles of everyday fashion and the styles of wedding dresses, but the fashion trends may provide a clearer example of the effect of culture on style during the time. The most important trend during this time was how the clothing was used. People in the working class may have had a good set of work clothes and a good set of dress clothes. With the rise of consumerism, it became increasingly important for these blue collar shoppers to show that they could afford the same luxurious clothing as those in a higher class. Instead of purchasing a sensible work garment with one's last bit of change, it was often popular to test the boundaries of class and status by indulging in a wild accessory such as an extravagant hat to be worn on a special occasion such as a movie theatre outing in order to emulate the appearance of the white collar American (Peiss, 2011).

Other fashion trends of the time center mostly on the ideas of looking more masculine and improving functionality. The overall shape of most garments became tubular, creating a much more masculine silhouette than those to which women were previously accustomed. Popular

fashion of the previous decades was characterized by many layers and corsets to shape an ideal female body. The new silhouette called for a drastic change in the amount of fabric being used as corsets were no longer necessary for everyday wear and skirts became shorter. Backs, necks, and arms were often left bare in dresses to provide more freedom of movement and functionality while dancing (Kybalová, 1968).

The epitome of the new masculine trend was the “flapper” look which was featured in popular films (see Figure 2). The sleek designs of Paul Poiret (see Figure 3) leading up to the 1920s were further refined to define this look. Women opted for masculine haircuts such as the ‘bob’ to accompany their boyish look of flattened chests, lowered waistlines, and skirts which were at the calve length (Seid, 1989). The combination of a loose-fitting silhouette and lack of corset made it much easier for women to perform daily activities, keep up with their husbands,



1920s fashion
Photo: Getty Images
Figure 2



Paul Poiret 1911 designs
Photo: Getty Images
Figure 3

and feel a sense of equality. At the same time, however, countless other women took to the more sexual persona. They began smoking, drinking, dancing and dressing provocatively, and wearing makeup which became popular as a result of new scientific developments in cosmetics (Seid, 1989).

Many women, regardless of taste in fashion, began joining social or pleasure clubs and behaving more like

men than ever before. Some businesswomen joined prominent benefit societies while younger students or factory workers joined clubs through which members could get together to smoke, drink, and gamble (Peiss, 2011). Some women simply enjoyed their new found freedom and partook in sexual experimentation but despite the increasing popularity of feminist ideals, most women continued socializing with men during their leisure time in the hopes of securing a husband (Peiss, 2011).

Securing a husband didn't prove to be much of a challenge during the 1920s. Despite the fact that the divorce rate rose 2,000 percent between 1867 and 1929, people continued getting married and the average age for marriage actually declined by about one year to 21 years old for women as the 1920s approached (Howard, 2006). There was, however, a shift in thinking about marriage. While marriage was previously seen as more of a necessity and tradition, the 1920s moved the focus to affection and personal fulfillment (Seid, 1989). The shift may have actually encouraged more young people to seek out this affection for personal fulfillment as Stephanie Coontz proclaimed in a 2005 work that "love and marriage had become vital to most people's sense of personal identity, with attachments to parents, siblings, and friends paling by comparison" (Cherlin, 2009). It became common to find that personal connection with a friend from a social or pleasure club and let the relationship blossom into a marriage. (Peiss, 2011).

Other ideals in the 1920s were changing too, especially regarding the characteristics of a good wife. The wife was previously expected to be a good mother and a compliant partner to her husband. The rise of feminism led women to desire equality within the marriage which seemed to align with the new expectations. Now that women were proving themselves in the workforce, wives were to be more equal to their husbands in that they be comparably athletic, intellectual,

competitive, and sexual, shifting the value of being a great mother to being a great lover and a more equal partner (Seid, 1989).

Preferences regarding the wedding ceremony shifted during the 1920s as well. The "New Woman" sought independence within her marriage and wanted to keep the wedding ceremony simplistic. This was a common desire towards the beginning of the period because extravagant white weddings were condemned prior to the 1920s for representing consumerism. However, while the traditional idea of simplicity was valued, the rapidly developing consumeristic society and new technological outlets for bridal advertisements made way for the American white wedding as we know it today (Howard, 2006).

The increased power of advertising popularized the use of the bridal salon within a department store whether the purchased garment was to be a reusable, colored dress or a one time-use, white gown. Because the decade served as a time of transition for the popularization of the white wedding, the most popular style of dress was evolving from the versatile, colored gown to the formal, white gown throughout the period. Especially towards the beginning of the decade it was acceptable to wear the gown again for another special event and it was therefore not uncommon for it to be a light color (Howard, 2006).

The 1920s marked the end of the extreme ornamentation seen in earlier 1900s wedding gowns which included corsets and full skirts in addition to elaborate frills, beading, and other decorations. Instead, the cut of the dress became the most important aspect. Slim torsos and dropped waists were key features. Gowns could be sleeveless or feature flimsy, short sleeves while the most popular neckline shifted from square to boat over the course of the decade. Skirts were loosely gathered, draped unevenly, or lightly filled with tulle. As the period progressed, draped fabric became more common and was used to not only to create an uneven look but to

layer as well as gather fabric at one hip. The hemline of the skirt crept upward until it reached knee length in the middle of the decade, making it the one of the shortest popular wedding dresses in history. Despite the rising height of the skirt, the option of a train was available and chosen many times (Probert, 1984).

While cut was vital, decoration and fabric choice were still important. The most popular decorations included silver cords, flower garlands, beading, tightly fitting hats with or without veiling, single strands of pearls at the waist, and antique family lace trimmings. The most popular fabric was satin during this period, whether it was the material for the dress, the slip, or the trim. Other popular fabrics included crepe de chine, taffeta, silver cloth, lame, lace, chiffon, tulle, and tissue (Probert, 1984). Overall, the dresses during this time were slimmer, more simplistic, and more revealing than those of the past (see Figures 4-6).



1927 embroidered, pink gown
Photo: Zimmerman
Figure 4



1925 satin gown
Photo: Zimmerman
Figure 5



1920 beige, satin gown
Photo: Probert
Figure 6

Ball State's Beeman Collection contains two unique, local wedding dress samples from the 1920s. Following an analysis of each garment, it is clear that they are truly authentic to the period and reflect the same cultural influences as described above. The first sample from the collection did not provide any information other than the decade from which it came, the 1920s. The gown appears to be made entirely of lace, silk, and tulle. It is cream in color and features the long, rectangular silhouette which was indicative of the decade's fashion. All other aspects of the dress's cut and style also align directly with those described by Probert (1984) and Howard (2006). The skirt is layered, pulled up at one hip where a lace flounce is featured, and offers a distinctly asymmetrical hemline. Delicate short sleeves and a boat neckline are present. As suggested in readings, there is minimal decoration in comparison to previous decades. The most evident decorative feature can be found on the hip opposite the flounce in the form of a beaded tassel and strand of pearls. While not outrageously decorative, there are other elements incorporated in the gown.

There is an intricate floral detail embroidered into the lace on the shoulders and at the hip flounce as well as delicate

lace bodice lining inside of the dress. Based on these findings, specifically the presence of a boat



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 7



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 8

neckline and asymmetrical skirt, it appears as though the dress (see Figures 7-12) is from the latter half of the decade and closely resembles the 1925 satin gown pictured above (see Figure 5).



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 9



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 10



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 11



1920s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 12

The second sample from the Beeman Collection was donated in 1997 by Judith Raephe, although the actual year in which it was worn remains unknown. This gown is more casual, appearing to be made wholly of blue chiffon with a cream lace overlay at the bodice. This dress also features the signature rectangular silhouette but is significantly shorter than the first garment. The neckline and sleeves are rather interesting in this case. The scoop neck was chosen and a lace overlay which is only attached at the neck gives the gown a type of butterfly sleeve. The skirt is also unique in that it is tiered, made of 4 bias-cut panels (2 in the front, 2 in the back) which add distinct flare and an asymmetric hemline when worn. As expected, the dress has a dropped waistline. A unique decorative aspect of this piece is a belt at the natural waist despite the seam located at the dropped waist. To further differentiate this feature, the closure in the back of the belt is a hook and eye made of two silver, crescent moon pieces which accentuate the color of the gown with blue and white gemstones. Aside from the lace overlay and relatively bold color, this is the only decorative feature. It is more difficult to gauge the time period of this dress (see Figures 13-17) because while the color seems indicative of the earlier 1920s, the short and paneled skirt point to later 1920s. In addition, the overlay top is a near match to (see Figure 4) another colored gown from 1927.



1920s Judith Raephe Beeman
Collection gown
Figure 13



1920s Judith Raephe
Beeman Collection gown
Figure 14



1920s Judith Raephe Beeman
Collection gown
Figure 15



1920s Judith Raephe
Beeman Collection gown
Figure 16



1920s Judith Raephe Beeman Collection
gown
Figure 17

Several conclusions can be drawn in regards to the style of the gowns in this period. The shape of the 1920s dresses was directly influenced by the feminist ideals in the “New Woman” movement. Women were seeking equality in many aspects of life at this time, including marriage. This led to the overall masculinity of fashion during the decade and therefore to the masculine silhouettes of the wedding dresses. Other cultural factors supported this silhouette shift as well. Because women were more integrated than ever into the American labor force following WWI, they began to lead more active lifestyles which included joining clubs and going dancing in the new jazz scene. As ease of movement became more necessary, garments had to become less decorative and more functional. This not only led to the gown’s shape, but also helped bring about the reduction of fabric in all garments, including the wedding dress. This reduction of fabric was also the result of both the new cultural ideal of the sexualization of women as encouraged by films and the rationing of fabric during WWI. While the silhouette appeared masculine and functional for the “New Women”, the underlying message of overt sexuality throughout the decade undeniably had a hand in the rising hemline and lack of distinct sleeves in the wedding gowns.

The new consumerism culture of the United States also had an effect on garments during this time. The popularization of advertisement allowed the wedding industry to blossom while the consumeristic mindset was forming in Americans and brides who were willing to splurge on elaborate items as noted by Peiss (2011). While the casual, colorful dress did remain present through the decade, this change in culture began commercializing the classic American white wedding as seen by the first sample from the Beeman, a formal, satin, cream-colored gown (see Figures 7-12).

It is clear that technological advancements and feminism were the most noteworthy cultural factors of the 1920s decade. Each of these factors translated to a distinct influence on the style of the American wedding dress. The most popular silhouette (tubular), color (white), length (rising), and sleeve styles (short/bare) were all determined by the cultural atmosphere in the country at the time which can be not only seen in writings but verified through first-hand analysis of authentic garments.

1970s

Fifty years farther down the road of American history there was a crisis. The American standard of living which had boomed in the 1950s fell in the 1970s below that of comparable European countries. Home and car prices continued to increase while income continued to decrease. An oil embargo in 1973 added to inflation rate and showed the American people the harsh disadvantages of relying on foreign energy (Jellison, 2008). Oil and food shortages were experienced. People were forced into savings mode; save gas, save energy, save money (Seid, 1989). By the 1970s, fifty percent of married women with children in school were part of the paid labor force; dual incomes were a necessity in stark contrast with the "housewife" atmosphere of the 1950s when that figure remained around twenty percent (Jellison, 2008).

Jellison (2008) stated that an “eight percent inflation rate, a growing national budget deficit, and the loss of domestic and export markets for American manufactured goods all conspired to reverse thirty years of U.S. economic progress” (p. 32).

Despite economic turmoil, the 1970s, much like the 1920s, came with new technology and music. On a large scale, technology sent Americans into space with the successful moon landing in 1969 while on a smaller scale, the introduction of personal technology such as television and video games was keeping them at home. As opposed to spending leisure outdoors or with social groups as was common in the 1920s, people of the 1970s chose to stay comfortably indoors with the recently invented television and even newer video games. However, people did leave the house occasionally as the tendency of young adults to go dancing to new music remained similar to the 1920s. The difference was that the new music of the 1970s was disco, a genre that would greatly influence fashion (“70s culture,” 2012). The prevalence of dancing clubs and roller disco served to counteract the leisure time spent at home as the public health, exercise, and remaining fit gained popularity in culture and fashion during this time as well (Seid, 1989).

Nostalgia became a huge influence in the fashion of the 1970s. This was most likely due to the desire to be a part of a simpler time with less economic distress. Because of this, there was some degree of tradition and formality reintroduced in fashion contrasting the hippie attire of the 1960s (Probert, 1984). The uncertainty of the state of the nation led women to seek control over their own lives through a new wave of feminism and an overwhelming need for individualism and self-expression, especially through clothing. Maintaining some of the ideals from the recent hippie movement, people were seen as free thinkers and often questioned the government or ‘establishment’. Rebellious behavior was common among teens who used the decade’s lack of a unifying style to distance themselves even further from the norm (“70s culture,” 2012). While

some of the free-flowing bohemian styles of the 1960s remained prevalent, the majority of women scattered into one of several other categories such as glam rock, punk, and disco (Probert, 1984).

Disco, influenced by the music and dancing which accompanied it, was the most easily recognizable style to come out of the 1970s. This consisted of heavily sequined pieces, tube tops, bell bottoms, wrap dresses, leotards, and the ever-versatile spandex. These were statement pieces that would get someone noticed in a crowded club so they often came in loud colors and patterns. This crowd also widely accepted the midi skirt which hit at a length in between that of a mini and that of a maxi, often between the knee and calf. While the midi-style skirt was growing in popularity, mini and maxi skirts were common as well, as both could adequately elongate the figure ("1970-1980," 2014).

Other key fashion styles of the era did not take the population by storm like disco but are still notable. Glam rock and punk were fashion trends influenced by emerging genres of music. While it would take a few decades for each of these styles to fully develop, the beginnings of each can be seen in the fashion of the 1970s. Glam rock devotees wore odd fabrics such as satin or velvet in everyday wear. They would further differentiate themselves by choosing a bright color or something with jewels on it. This look was most similar to disco. The punk fans on the other hand, introduced the style predominantly seen would be seen again in the 1990s which consisted of tight jeans and leather jackets over ripped t-shirts ("1970-1980," 2014).

The other popular styles of the decade were mostly borrowed looks from previous decades, as the nostalgia was the biggest influencing factor. Masculine styles were especially popular because of the new wave of feminism the 1970s brought. Pant suits and earthy tones and colors were favored by many. Some aspects of the 1960s bohemian style such as free-flowing pants

and prairie dresses were common. It would not be uncommon to see each of these distinct styles publicly represented by various types of individuals in a single day as there were so many options since self-expression through both fashion and music was a priority ("1970-1980," 2014).

When not choosing a style to represent them for the day, women were calling for a "feminist revolution" (Jellison, 2008). Unlike the drive for equality in the 1920s which was centered on the adult women of the era, feminists in the 1970s pushed for equality of all generations, in education and clubs above all. They aimed to get rid of textbooks which showed stereotyped gender roles, to integrate both genders into industrial tech and home economics classes, and to change the Girl Scout's focus from learning homemaking skills to a developing a variety of skills through numerous activities (Jellison, 2008). Education continued to be a focus for adult women as well. Both divorcees and "young wives were able to take advantage of new job and educational opportunities that feminist reformers proctored through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1972" (Jellison, 2008, p. 41).

The number of divorcees taking advantage of Title VII and Title IX and returning to school was increasing as the cultural views on marriage shifted farther toward those of a divorce culture. Divorce was considered more acceptable while rates increased from the mid 20% rates seen in the previous two decades to nearly 50% after the 1970s began with California becoming the first state to allow divorce on non-adversarial grounds, meaning neither party is at fault (Jellison, 2008). In addition to an increasing divorce rate, by the end of the period, specifically between 1977 and 1979, the number of cohabitating couples increased by 40%. These developments combined to create a more relaxed cultural view of marriage. Because Americans

could live together without being married and exit a marriage at any point in time, it was no longer seen as a necessity or a permanently binding union (Jellison, 2008).

Whether couples waited or married right away, the gender roles were changing as those established in the 1950s became difficult to maintain in the declining economy. Due to the spike in popularity of feminist ideology as well as the economic status of the country, dual income households were the norm whether the couple was married or not. It became the responsibility of both parties to provide for the family which gave women more power than they held during previous pushes for feminism, as in the 1920s. Because there was less of a rush to get married, women felt more comfortable taking time to build their careers; the average age for marriage and having children increased to 22 years old for women during this time after having fallen to 20 years old during the 1950s and 1960s (Jellison, 2008).

This less strict view on marriage led to an attempted revolution of the wedding industry by one author who sought to capitalize on the rebellious inclinations of the period's youth. The "new wedding" as opposed to "old wedding" or "white wedding" was pushed by Khoren Arisian's 1973 book, *The New Wedding*. The concept was based on rebellious counterculture of 1970s and the rising number of older, nontraditional, and feminist brides. Arisian believed people should end the traditional wedding because of its emphasis on men owning women and promotion of the father "giving away" the bride like property (Jellison, 2008).

Marcia Seligson's (1973) *The Eternal Bliss Machine* was the competing literature of the time, supporting the white wedding. The wedding industry was growing; it reached eight billion dollars by the end of the decade. The industry promoted the traditional wedding in magazines and bridal fairs to highlight the baby boomer's ideals of a white wedding (Howard, 2006). This was crucial because nostalgia greatly influenced couples who looked up to their parents'

generation for financial and marriage advice in the trying economic times (Jellison, 2008). The bridal magazines not only helped businesses network but also fostered the expansion of the market, popularized services such as gift registry and the wedding salon, and shaped “tradition” for the new brides, 86% of who were readers. The popularity of this mainstream, white wedding media resulted in many brides purchasing their gowns from the bridal department of major department stores (Howard, 2006). The overall efforts of the wedding industry to stop the “new wedding” movement were worth-while because as one text stated: “perhaps in part because of the growing success of the middle-class suburban conservatism, as well as the concerted efforts of the wedding industry, white wedding gowns continued to find a ready market among most people throughout the 60s and 70s” (Howard, 2006).

In fact, it seemed that 1970s brides were even more likely than those of previous decades to wear a traditional white gown. Ninety-four percent of all gowns worn were white or ivory while 87% were floor length, providing the bride with a popular, lengthened silhouette (Jellison, 2008). Gowns were so conventional that some younger women even wore their mothers’, fit permitting, in order to save money and fulfil their

nostalgic desires (Zimmerman, 1985). Coming out of the hippie era of the 1960s, the gowns from the

beginning of the 1970s were soft and filmy. The dress was meant to look sensual and fanciful with the focus more on the body beneath than the structure of the garment. The shape was long and thin and generally either narrowed at the waist or showed no definition. A petticoat or slip



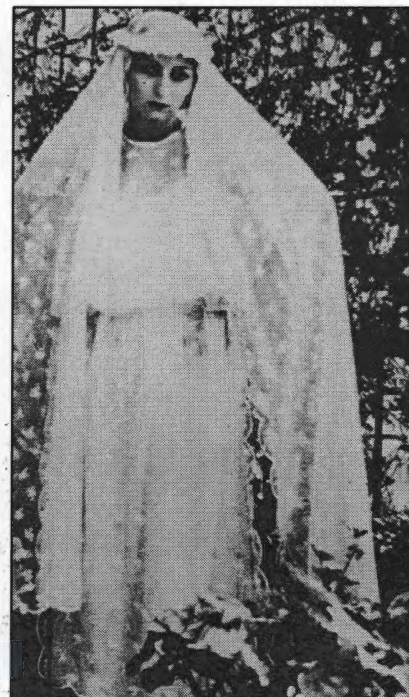
1978 Cardin layered lace gowns
Photo: Probert
Figure 18

formed the bottom layer of the dress which left the exposed neck and arms to be covered by the outermost layer. Sleeves further displayed the ideal of soft sensuality seen in the silhouette; they were generally long and either straight or puffed. As the decade progressed there appeared to be slight added fullness to the sleeves. Originally, the skirt would be loosely flowing without much structure so the fabric could be easily gathered if needed to benefit the bride's ease of movement. Midway through the 1970s, however, fullness was being added back into the skirt similarly to that of the sleeves (Probert, 1984). Tiers of lace could be used to give fullness and the traditional sweeping train became popular again (Zimmerman, 1985).

The dress (see Figures 18-20) would most likely be made of a chiffon, lace, embroidered silk, filmy net, nylon, or cotton. Decorations were minimal and only gained slight popularity as the decade went on. However, fabric frills began appearing mid-decade and were placed everywhere including necklines, sleeves, and even all along a shoulder to waist seam. As time passed, and skirts and sleeves became fuller, flounces and frills were added at ends or seams. Because hair tended to be much longer in this era than in the 1920s, there was more decoration to



1970's Piccione gown for home wedding
Photo: Zimmerman
Figure 19



1978 Sonia Rykiel 20's-inspired gown
Photo: Probert
Figure 20

be flaunted outside of the dress. Hair would be either down or casually pulled up and often featured a flower or two. Long, thin veils were popular, as were small hats reminiscent of the 1920s (Probert, 1984).

There was only one sample dress available in the Beeman Collection for the 1970s but it serves as an accurate representation of the characteristics and cultural influences described of the 1970s. The gown was donated in 1989 by Ann Riddle. The dress was purchased from JCPenney and worn in 1977. It is ivory in color and features a rectangular silhouette, though it is notably closer fitting to the body than the 1920s dresses, as indicated by darts in the bodice. There is a distinct seam at the natural waistline which is further accentuated by a decorative lace band as well as a large “v” in both the front and back of the bodice. The inner most layer is a silk slip with a scoop neckline. The dress, made of filmy net and lace, gives the outer layer of the garment a high neckline and loosely fitted long sleeves. The decorative aspects are subtle and minimalistic as would be expected for this era. Floral lace detail can be seen throughout the dress in elements such as the ruffled cuffs on the sleeves, the trim up the arm of the sleeve, the neck, and near the hemline of the skirt, and the detail in the decorate “v” at the front and back. This gown (see Figures 21-26) also features a train and bears some



1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 21

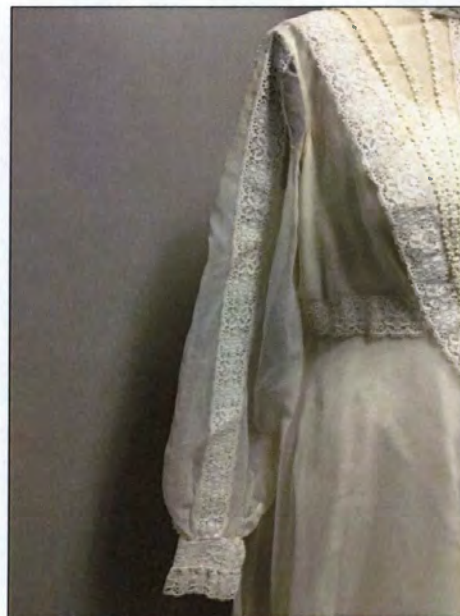


1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 22

resemblance the each of those shown in Figures 18-20. The resemblance and the distinguishable features from the second half of the decade such as fuller sleeves and frills serve to validate the dress's authenticity and give way for conclusions to be drawn regarding the cultural connections.



1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 23



1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 24



1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 25



1970s Beeman Collection gown
Figure 26

In the case of the 1970s, nostalgia and feminism were the key influential factors in determining the most popular style of the wedding gown. The desire to have been brought up during a simpler time led to collective feelings of nostalgia. With the economy and cultural view of marriage in states of flux, young adults looked to older generations, specifically their parents, in an attempt to mimic the decisions that worked well for them. Perhaps the thinking was that if stability was the result of their white wedding in the past, that traditional ceremony must be the key to happiness in the present. This contributed greatly to the overwhelming popularity of the white wedding and white wedding gown despite the new nonchalance regarding divorce, the plethora of common street fashion styles, and the attempt by some to unfavorably influence the white wedding industry with the idea of the "new wedding".

The shape and simplicity of the gown were molded by the newest feminist ideals as well as the new value placed on exercise. While nostalgia contributed in part to the 1920s-esque silhouette, the newly rediscovered emphasis on equality in the workplace as well as the home subconsciously shifted the focus towards more shapeless, masculine styles. The value of exercise then led to the desire to wear a simple garment which allowed the wearer's body to be recognized and celebrated as opposed to the structural details and ornamentation such as the corset-driven shape of the 1910s dresses or the accessories (gloves, hats, veils, etc.) of the 1950s and 1960s which have held focus in previous decades.

It is interesting that the elements of culture can be seen in the locally donated garments from both decades (1920s and 1970s). This shows that despite a drastic difference in communication capabilities between the two periods, the Midwest remained as fashion forward as the rest of the country at least in terms of wedding attire. It could be argued that this is due to the particularly strong Midwestern values regarding marriage. Regardless of the reason, it is

evident that the cultural environment during any given period of time has a distinct and identifiable impact on the style of the wedding dresses worn both locally and nationally. Based on this conclusion, it becomes possible to work in the opposite direction and predict the style of a dress based on what the cultural environment will offer.

2020s

Heading into 2020, I believe that America will be facing many cultural changes. The most significant changes will be the increasing diversity of the population, technological advancements, and social causes. Many minority groups are growing rapidly but none, it seems, are growing as quickly as the Hispanic population. If not by 2020, shortly thereafter, the members of majority and minority groups as they are currently understood will shift. The Caucasian group will become a minority within the country as the immigrant and multiracial populations form the majority.

By 2020, technological advancements will be setting the stage for advancements in countless other fields. In terms of personal fashion, wearable technology and smart textiles will be the norm for every day wear. In addition, 3-D printing and 3-D painting will be so commonplace that anything will be customized or added to at the tap of a screen, or at the command of a voice. Technological advancements will make it effortless to securely connect with anyone in the world instantaneously which will revolutionize global partnerships and personal relationships for all. Nearly every shopping need will be able to be condensed into a digital form which will transform the consumer's buying habits and expectations. The American people's desire to search for value will not dissipate by 2020 but the new technology may bring about a sense of entitlement causing them to raise their expectations for all products.

Music and fashion will see major changes as well. The decade will be the height of “dance music”. More genres will develop which solely incorporate electronically produced sounds. The beats will be sharp and evocative of crisp, geometric lines. This will prove to be a big influence in fashion. As seen on the fashion trend board pictured (see Figure 27) the overall feel of the decade will be high fashion meets street style. Androgyny and sex appeal will be common themes, both separately and together as Americans celebrate equal rights. Efficient, clean lines evoked by popular music will serve to represent androgyny as well. The colors will



be indicative of high fashion, including many variations of black and white. Environmental responsibility will be a top priority in the fashion industry and will foster the development of eco-friendly textiles, manufacturing practices, and packaging. Technological advancements will be represented as well through wearable technology and smart textiles such as solar paneled textiles and fabrics that change color as a result of certain stimuli.

Fashion trend board
Figure 27

Social causes will be very important to the activists of 2020. The historic pushes for feminism will be exchanged for the fight for equal rights for all humans regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, religion, personal identity, or any other identifier. This battle for total equality will come with the need for individualism, non-conformism, and self-expression to an unheard of extent. Along with this will come another wave of the body positivity movement which became popular in the 2010s. This movement will continue to not only encourage all individuals regardless of physical appearance to practice self-acceptance and confidence, but it will inspire everyone to love and accept each other despite their ability or inability to achieve physical ideals pushed by the media. While uniting the people for the sake of unity will be a core value, uniting to save the planet will be crucial as well. Huge strides in environmental responsibility will be made by the United States, especially in terms of passing regulations to benefit the well-being of the country and its inhabitants.

The wedding culture will be fairly straight forward. Marriage, including legal same-sex marriage, will be a personal choice which will have minimal bearing on how your character is judged. Complete sexual freedom will be common among the younger generation of adults. Pre-marital sex and cohabitation will be understood to be a part of life and remaining single indefinitely will be as normal a choice as getting married. This being said, those who choose to get married will continue indulging in extravagant ceremonies reminiscent of the white wedding, though the dress will stray from the traditional.

Based on the findings presented in this paper, it is simple to predict the predominant wedding gown trends for the decade of 2020. The most important aspect to remember is that variety in this decade is inevitable. With diversity increasing and the need for self-expression breaking the traditional white wedding mold, one style will not gain enough popularity to

become the ultimate representation. The wedding dress trend board pictured (see Figure 28) predicts the most common stylistic attributes while conveying the overall tone of the era. In general, the silhouette will be long and thin, with the dress constructed from lightweight, easily recyclable materials. Lace and tulle will remain at the top of the bride's wish list as they have in the past. The two most distinctive features of the decade will be color and sex appeal. Dresses will be seen in a variety of light metallic shades as well as black. Very pale shades will be the most popular. Sex appeal will be prevalent in nearly every piece. Completely sheer regions, cutouts, lace, and deep plunges will serve to expose as much skin as possible. Androgyny will be seen in two piece garments including casually effeminate pantsuits. Technologically enhanced textiles will also be popular among those who wish to differentiate themselves entirely. Another key difference between the dresses of this decade and those of the past is that brides will be able to customize and order dresses online with ease.

The connections between 2020s culture and wedding dress style will be similar to the connections established in regards to the previous decades. The popularity of the electronic music will inspire the simple, slender silhouette of the dress. The prevalence of color in the gowns will be inspired by the need for ultimate self-expression as well as the growing Hispanic population. These brides will bring with them a culture of tradition in which color is very important so it is crucial to offer meet their needs. The increase in sex appeal and visible skin will be influenced by a growing acceptance of sexual freedom and self-expression. Social issues will influence aspects as well. Total equality will affect the popularity of androgynous options including pantsuits while environmental responsibility will lead to the widespread use of eco-friendly materials. Technological advancements will not only impact the availability of the smart garments but the ability to customize and order a dress entirely online.



Wedding dress trend board
Figure 28

In conclusion, it has been shown that popular culture as it pertains to women, women's fashion trends, and the collective cultural view on weddings and marriage all come together to influence the most popular style of wedding dress during any given decade. It was mainly the feminist ideals and technological advancements which shaped the flapper style wedding gowns of the 1920s as displayed by the masculine silhouette and growing popularity of the white gown. Fifty years later, nostalgia and feminism led the way to the simple, traditional gowns of the 1970s which incorporated the masculine silhouette from the 1920s as well as the traditional white wedding ideals and gowns cherished by the parent generation of 1950s brides. Fifty years after that, technological advancements and social acceptance will combine with many other cultural factors to create the delicate yet sexy gowns of the 2020s. Colorful and technologically advanced fabrics will allow the brides of the future to create customized looks and express themselves fully.

Cultural factors, including everything from the current state of the economy to pop culture events, can have a tremendous impact on all other aspects of life. Despite the lessening emphasis on marriage as a necessity, it remains an important rite of passage for many Americans. They continue to evolve with their social environment, creating ever-changing cultural factors, fashion trends, and marriage ideals which influence the wedding gowns of the given period. Drawing connections between such factors and the predominant wedding gown style can certainly help develop an understanding for how the surrounding world remains interconnected, an understanding which is unfortunately undervalued. It is crucial to learn the ways in which you contribute to the culture around you and recognize the impact that culture has on other aspects of your life whether that impact manifests itself through such means as art, science, or simply the wedding gown you choose.

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